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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PARM](#) [KNNP](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER DISCUSSES REGIONAL AND NUCLEAR
ISSUES, DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP WITH CODEL FEINGOLD

Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B and D)

Summary

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11. (C) Minister of Defense A.K. Antony discussed with Senator Feingold on May 30 regional issues including Pakistan, Burma, and Afghanistan, nuclear issues in the context of the U.S. presidential election and Iranian proliferation, and the U.S.-India defense relationship. Antony said that India favors better relations with Pakistan through dialogue, but that the situation is as yet too fluid for optimism. India remains committed to the reconstruction process in Afghanistan, and to peacekeeping world-wide. The insurgent threat in the northeast explains India's need to maintain good relations with the Burmese regime despite its terrible human rights practices. Antony understood that the window is closing on the nuclear deal. He favored dialogue with Iran to curb proliferation. He observed that progress in the bilateral defense relationship in recent years had made possible frank discussion about difficult issues, such as end use monitoring, and recommended that a relaxation of U.S. requirements could help the relationship develop even more quickly.

Regional Issues: Pakistan Talks, Burma Threatens

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12. (C) Antony supports better relations with Pakistan through continuing dialogue and seeking opportunities for mutual cooperation. The Indian government has already indicated its support to the new Pakistan government, but Antony said it may be too soon for optimism; the situation remains too fluid and unstable. Terrorist attacks against the Pakistan military and Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) have demonstrated even to Pakistanis the magnitude of the internal threat. Antony said the Taliban remain a factor in Afghanistan and that India remains concerned about Pakistan's role. Antony described India's relationship with Afghanistan as "very cordial," saying India is committed to the reconstruction process there.

13. (C) India's long, shared border with Burma and the threat of insurgents in the northeast justifies India's cooperation with the Burmese regime, according to Antony. When asked whether India sells military equipment to Burma, Antony demurred, then indicated only limited equipment in very small amounts. India has made itself clear, according to Antony, that it does not support Burma's terrible human rights practices, saying they need to pursue national reconciliation. Unemployment is a major contributor to the insurgency in Assam, but Antony indicated that numerous

external groups are supporting the insurgents, also providing a reason for cooperation with neighboring governments.

Nuclear Issues: Window Closing on Nuclear Deal

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14. (C) Antony observed that Indians are following the U.S. Presidential campaigns with great interest and expressed interest in Senator Feingold's opinion that India has a window of opportunity to approve the nuclear deal, but that it would likely be more difficult under a new administration.

Antony said his government shares U.S. nonproliferation goals, including regarding Iran, but also feels that other countries have a legitimate right to civilian nuclear power. He recommended that the IAEA find a solution with regard to Iran through continued dialogue.

Progress in U.S.-India Defense Relationship

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15. (C) There has been notable progress in the last few years on the U.S.-India defense relationship. Antony noted that the relationship is now "frank," permitting both sides to finally tackle difficult, important issues such as export controls. Antony assessed that there has not been much technology transfer overall and that a "relaxation" of U.S. requirements could help the relationship develop more quickly. He lauded the considerable progress made so far and observed that resolving these issues takes time. U.S.-India joint exercises have come a long way since their "humble" start and that all the services are now involved.

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16. (C) Senator Feingold praised India's dedication to peacekeeping, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Antony replied that India has about 8,000 military personnel currently involved in peacekeeping missions world-wide, and that he expects this commitment to continue.

17. (SBU) This message has not been cleared by CODEL Feingold.

MULFORD